



ANIMAL RITES AND JUSTICE

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On April 27, 1985, the International Society for Religion and Animal Rights held a memorial service for Wind-of-Fire, my deceased animal companion, and all unmourned and suffering animals.[1] The service was picked up by Associated Press and United Press International and received wide coverage, including commentary pro, con, and humorous.

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RELIGION

Jim Harter, Animals: 1419
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New York: Dover, 1979

Although the service had supporters both within and without the religious community, a few ministers of the Christian faith, in particular two publicly and one through my acquaintance, said they would not attend such a service as anima/ls do not have souls, and therefore, it was inappropriate to hold a service which implied that anima/ls would participate in a resurrection, afterlife, or in particular heaven.

Anna Kingsford, a nineteenth century feminist/mystic and anima/l rights activist, pointed out that all forms of life are regarded as having souls within the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Genesis, the word in Hebrew which applies to all living things is "Nephesh," meaning soul. As Kingsford points out, in The Perfect Way, a series of her lectures published in London in 1882, "had the Bible been accurately translated, the doctrine that all creatures whatsoever represent incarnations, though in different conditions, of one and the same universal soul, would not now need to be re-declared, or, when re-declared would not be received with repugnance." [2] And in the Old Testament, Job 12:10, reference is made to "the soul of every living thing."

It is ironic that a couple of Christian ministers who go further than many Christians in acknowledging that anima/ls have something spiritual to them believe that anima/ls (non-human ones) have a "group soul." According to this way of thinking, no anima/l, apart from the human anima/l, has individuality or an individual essence or soul. The consequences that follow from this way of thinking are quite disturbing. One minister with this belief suggested to his wife, whose anima/l companion, a dog, was quite ill, that rather than trying to heal it, she should replace it with another dog. Since anima/ls have a group soul, one anima/l was easily replaced by another. Another minister who holds this belief would not participate in the memorial service, particularly in regard to the sacrament that was offered. His belief that anima/ls have a group soul led to the belief that it is inappropriate to have a memorial service for an anima/l which suggests that his or her individual soul will participate in a resurrection, afterlife, or, as stated before, heaven.

In the July, 1985, issue of Monday

Morning, a magazine for Presbyterian ministers, a Presbyterian pastor accused the service of "humanism," stating that, "We are of the reformed faith, the church reformed always reforming. I hardly believe that funerals like the one for Wind-of-Fire are steps in this reformation process." Another pastor, responding in the September, 1985, issue of the same magazine, countered this by saying, "the pastor reports, and seemingly has problems with, the minister saying that God's Love extends to all of creation and offering prayers for animals that are victims of human injustice. I am disturbed by what this seems to say both about the role of a pastor towards a grieving person and about the relationship of humans to animals." [3]

One humorous response to the service appeared in a column called "Insect Rights," by John C. Dvorak, in The San Francisco Examiner, Monday, May 6, 1985. Mr. Dvorak commented, "She's already had services for dogs and cats. But you know where she drops the ball? I see no evidence that she'll let the dogs and cats into the ministry! It's a sham!" I might respond to Mr. Dvorak that, my Master of Divinity aside, at present I am a lay minister no more and no less than many anima/ls of my acquaintance.

Anna Kingsford always said that her grounding in religion was not in the historical and institutional aspects but in the universal truths that lie at the heart of the faith. It was in this spirit that she considered herself a Christian. And it was in

this spirit that she interpreted the meaning of scripture, the scriptures of the Judeo-Christian tradition and other religious traditions. According to one of her biographers, "the last journey of her life was not a happy experience, but it was an informative one. Here, at the centre of institutional Christendom, she found that the Church had lost the supreme vision of the Christian faith--the deliverance of all creation, and not of human beings only, 'into the glorious liberty of the children of God;' and that in place of this pristine splendour all that it could now see and teach was a selfish form of humanism--what human beings, here and hereafter and at whatever cost to the rest of life, must obtain for themselves alone." [4]

Untold numbers of people have left the Church as a result of the same kind of spe-

ciesist interpretation of tradition that was evident in the response of several clergypersons to the service for Wind-of-Fire and all unmourned and suffering anima/ls. It is not clear how many have left other religious traditions for similar reasons. The goals of Judaism and of Christianity are the same, the liberation of all forms of life, but one does not hear of people leaving the synagogue for reasons of speciesism.

Obviously, the memorial service for Wind-of-Fire was not based on an historical interpretation or institutional interpretation of either the Judeo/Christian tradition or the other traditions included in the Order of Service. And yet, ironically, a radical interpretation of the Judeo/Christian tradition, an interpretation that goes to the roots of the tradition, would exonerate everything that took place within the context of the service, particularly in regard to the sacrament, or "Sharing of the Bread: An Agape Meal," for all anima/ls, all of the creation.

The heart of the Eucharist, the Christian communion service based on the Hebrew Passover of Pasach meal, insofar as it relates to the universalist meaning of "The Sharing of the Bread: An Agape Meal, is sharing. Sharing is one of the three key meanings of the Eucharist" all of which relate to each other. These are the notions of sharing, liberation, and kingdom.

According to Tissa Balasuriya, "For the early Christians the ceremony of the breaking of bread--Eucharist--was intimately connected with the sharing of bread. It was not a mere formalist ceremonial. The Eucharist signified sharing. We have seen how the early Christian groups shared what they had so that there was no one in need. For Jesus, too, the Last Supper, the first and inaugural Eucharist, was closely associated with his self-giving." [5]

This sharing often took place in the context of an "agape meal" in which the most deprived members of the community, the outcasts, were offered bread. Thus, the name for the sacrament, "The Sharing of the Bread: An Agape Meal," to make the point that anima/ls are outcasts in our society. They must be included sacramentally and literally within "the fold."

The second meaning of the Eucharist, liberation, is based on the original Pasach meal symbolizing the liberation of the Jews from Egypt. The New Testament takes up this idea, and the Eucharist becomes a symbol, not only of the liberation of the Jews, but of the entire creation. This carries out the Jewish notion of the Messiah or Kingdom in which each life form will be in harmony with every other life form: war and strife will cease, as will what we call the food chain and our position on it. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." [6]

Thus, the Eucharist is eschatological. It concerns the final destiny of the creation in general and of the individual soul in particular. As defined in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, it concerns "the doctrine of the last things."

In both Judaism and Christianity, the destiny of the individual soul and creation in general is the Kingdom, or Messiah, in which the lion and lamb will lie down together. In what has been called "realized eschatology," it becomes the responsibility of human beings to actively participate in the bringing in of this Kingdom or Messiah. In Romans 8:19, Paul says, "For the earnest

expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons and daughters of God." And, again, in Romans 21 and 22, "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." There is no liberation for human beings without liberation for all anima/ls.

Thus, "the Eucharist demands the championing of rights. In this sense the eucharistic table prefigures the ultimate stage of liberation, the realization of the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven. It is eschatological. It signifies the stage promised in the Scriptures when the lion and the lamb can lie together and share the same pasture." [7]

The Eucharist was never intended to be a privatistic ritual for those who have achieved "personal salvation" in the individualistic sense. The Eucharist is meant to be universalist in the sense of embodying the

meaning of the Kingdom/Queendom. The eucharistic bread is meant to be a common meal for all. All will share the Kingdom/Queendom on earth, and all must share the commitment to bring in this Kingdom/Queendom through realized eschatology. "On earth as it is in heaven." This includes all anima/ls, human and nonhuman.

Inherent in the notion of Eucharist is the idea of justice. It is unjust that some should have bread and others not. It is unjust that the bodies of some forms of life should be utilized for food and mercilessly exploited by other forms of life. "When the Eucharist ceases to relate to liberation, it ceases to be connected with Christ's life sacrifice. It does not help constitute the Kingdom of God on earth; it does not even honor God objectively." [8]

James F. White, in a discussion of the sacraments, [9] poses the question, "What do we mean by justice?" According to White, one traditional way of defining justice is to state that it is unjust to consider any form of life of less worth than any other. It is unjust to reduce any being to a means to be used by another being for its ends, or even for the good of a majority's ends. Justice involves an obligation to respect the rights of all equally; it is an expression of love.

White goes on to say that "sacraments are intimately connected to justice, since sacraments provide means of acting out relationships by enfleshing them in visible forms; sacraments can also be perverted to make visible unjust relationships as well as just ones. Sacraments can become means of reinforcing relationships based on inequality, subordination, and subservience; sacraments often reflect in profound ways unspoken assumptions about the nature of relationships within the community of faith. The actions of the community may betray far more instances of clericalism, sexism, ageism, racism, and ethnicism [and, we would add, speciesism] than we would ever tolerate if such prejudices were articulated." [10]

The present manner of observing the Eucharist does not embody the universalist and planetary significance which is inherent in the Kingdom/Queendom notion. In its privatism it reflects the unspoken assumption that the Kingdom/Queendom is only for people

and, more specifically, for those people who have been saved in the individualistic sense. Today's Eucharist observances reflect the unspoken assumption that people are superior and worth more than other forms of life. Today's Eucharist is observed in a manner which reinforces relationships based on inequality among life forms. It does this not only by excluding other life forms from participation in the sacrament itself, but by not including liturgical acknowledgement of universalist salvation in which the lion and the lamb will lie down together in the Kingdom/Queendom. The Eucharist, as practiced today, is speciesist.

In "The Sharing of the Bread: An Agape Meal," we offered the traditional elements, bread and grape juice, of not only the Judeo-Christian tradition but of Hittite, American Indian, matriarchal and other traditions as well. Yet even as the elements of the Eucharist have been limited because of the tradition being carried out within the context of a predominant culture, they have been limited in their application to other forms of life.

"In the cultural adaptation of the Eucharist we should consider to what extent the use of bread and wine are absolutely essential in our context. Bread is not the daily food of most Asians, and certainly not the unleavened bread in the form of hosts. Would not some other forms of food and drink be more acceptable? A change or flexibility in this could increase the meaningfulness of the Eucharist." [11] And, one might add, of all rites that attempt to reflect the sharing, liberation, and Kingdom/Queendom concepts in a truly inclusive, nonspeciesist manner.

One of the arguments offered against sacraments such as "The Sharing of the Bread: An Agape Meal" or the notion of a universalist Eucharist for anima/ls is that anima/ls are pure and innocent and don't need sacraments. This goes back to the personal salvation, in the individualistic sense, notion of the Eucharist. According to this notion, the Eucharist is only for human sinners who have personally come to God or accepted Jesus Christ as savior. This notion belies the universalist message in the Eucharist as a symbol of the Kingdom/Queendom.

Another argument offered against ani-

ma/ls receiving sacraments is that anima/ls will not understand their meaning. In response to this argument, one may ask why the same criticism is not offered in regard to the Blessing of the anima/ls, a sacrament offered to nonhuman anima/ls within the Episcopalian Church, and sometimes the Catholic Church, as well.

The Blessing of the anima/ls is offered in honor of St. Francis, generally around the time of year that the saint passed on. The rite is explicitly and exclusively for non-human anima/ls, and it is the only sacrament offered by the Church which acknowledges the worth of other forms of life. It is a "communion service" acknowledging God's abiding love and sacrifice for all of the creation.

In 1986 the International Society for Religion and Animal Rights held another memorial service for all unmourned and suffering anima/ls in a Methodist church. In an attempt to more fully realize the significance of The Blessing of the anima/ls by including all forms of life, and in order to break down the notion of segregated sacraments, the sacrament offered was called "The Blessing of the Creatures."

The argument that anima/ls will not understand the significance of sacraments must be questioned when it is applied to an inclusive sacrament such as The Blessing of the Creatures or The Sharing of the Bread, or an implied universalist Eucharist and is not applied to a sacrament which is exclusively for nonhumans anima/ls, such as The Blessing of the anima/ls as it is observed, for the most part, at present. In addition to this, the argument reflects a speciesist bias, valuing and relying on one form of wisdom and comprehension, that which may be articulated by the human tongue alone, rather than all forms of wisdom and knowledge, including that which is yet to be revealed.

According to Job 12:7-9, "birds and animals have much they could teach you; ask the creatures of earth and seek for their wisdom. All of them know that the Lord's hand made them. It is God who directs the lives of God's creatures."

Anima/ls are teachers, sharers and sacrificers. They are unacknowledged ministers, leaders, healers, givers, and caretakers.

They are unacknowledged followers of the Gospel and the highest teachings of many religious traditions. They participate in the sharing aspect of the Eucharist. They also participate, if we are open to them, in the liberating aspect of the Eucharist. As we are liberated from each form of prejudice, including speciesism, we draw closer to God/ess and the qualities of the Kingdom/Queendom. Anima/ls can help to liberate us from qualities of selfishness, false pride based on speciesism, narrow-mindedness, coldness, and lack of compassion--qualities that stand in the way of the Kingdom/Queendom's realization. And anima/ls, of all kinds, are expected eventually to give up the qualities of predation. Not only are the lion and the lamb called to lie down together, breaking the false notion of the food chain, human beings are called to become vegetarians to bring the Kingdom/Queendom in. Human beings are called to go beyond their own species by way of compassion and lie down with the lion and the lamb.

Indeed, within the Judeo/Christian tradition, a call to religious leadership is not based on compassion to other humans but on a compassion to anima/ls, a compassion which goes beyond species. Moses was chosen for this reason by God to be a religious leader of Israel. His compassion went beyond his own species. He was merciful to his flock and nurtured a little kid that had run away because of thirst. He understood its feelings and could empathize with it. Jesus is often portrayed holding a lamb, carrying on this tradition of the good shepherd. I had a dream the other day in which a beautiful dog was looking over and protecting its flock, not on earth but in heaven. For those who like to explore word meanings in a symbolic sense, an ancient Hebrew art, God spelled backwards is dog. Dogs have also been unacknowledged shepherds.[12]

Sacraments and rites such as the Eucharist cannot reflect true equality without visions to accompany them. One such vision was Paul's in Galatians 4:28 when he said "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female [and, we may add, there is neither human nor anima/l] for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

A compassion that goes beyond one's own

species typifies the religious leader, sage, and avatar not only within the Judeo/Christian tradition but within other religious traditions as well. The Buddha reflected love for all of the creation. Buddhist rites reflect concern for other forms of life. They include memorial services as well as ordination services and services of remembrance for anima/ls.[13] There are stories within Buddhism of Buddhists giving up their lives for anima/ls, reflecting the sharing, liberating, and Kingdom/Queendom aspects of the Eucharist rite.

In Hinduism, Krishna is often portrayed with a cow. In matriarchal religious traditions, women are frequently regarded as the protectresses of anima/ls. A sculpture of Artemis from the second century A.D. portrays her as an abundant sustainer and nurturer of life. She is portrayed as having infinite breasts and is adorned with breasted, sculptured portrayals of cows and other anima/ls.[14]

Each year the International Society for Religion and anima/l Rights will attempt to hold a service in a traditional place of worship for all unmoored and suffering anima/ls. We do this within a traditional religious sanctuary to expand the notion of "sacred space" to other forms of life, inviting people to bring their anima/l friends. We aim for justice in sacraments, making them inclusive to reflect the Creator's concern for all life forms. The heretofore invisible (nonhuman life) becomes visible through affirmation and celebration. By standing up for anima/l rites, we stand up for anima/l rights.

Notes

1. The slash here added to "animal" serves to indicate that this word derives from "anima," a word for soul.

2. Anna Kingsford, The Perfect Way (London: Field & Tuer, Ye Leadenhall Presse, 1882):48.

3. Monday Morning is published by the Communications Unit of the Support Agency, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 475 Riverside Drive, New York city, NY 10115.

4. John Vyvyan, In Pity and in Anger

(London: Michael Joseph, 1969): 151.

5. Tissa Balasuriya, The Eucharist and Human Liberation (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979): 80.

6. Isaiah 11:9.

7. Balasuriya, 85.

8. Ibid, 38.

9. James F. White, Sacraments as God's Self Giving (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

10. Ibid., 95.

11. Balasuriya, 150.

12. "Anima/l rights" artist Joni Wehrli "substitutes" figures of dogs for human figures in scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Her work includes: "Adam and Eve with Serpent," "Baptism of Christ," "Saint George (and the Dragon)," "Saint John on Patros."

13. See Buddhism and Respect for Animals, in volume XI, numbers 7 and 8, of The Journal of Shasta Abbey (Shasta Abbey Press, Mt. Shasta, California).

14. Artemis Ephesia 125-175 A.D.

MESSAGE

From a genetically-engineered befelephant

I am well mixed up with this gene or that,
Making me grow big and lean — never fat;
No cholesterol! For this a bow, a mighty cheer,
My master, my mentor, mother-father, my engineer.
But on one little item you made a huge snafu
You gave me a heart that keeps saying "I love you."

I can only cry out as you go to "put me down" —
Please, a small heart (like yours) next time 'round

Ann Cottrell Free

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